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 HD **For one Nova Scotia school, climate education is preparation for the future; Students learn from 'Fridays for Future' protests, garden-building, recycling programs and more**
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Last spring, as students across the world prepared to walk out of class with the “Fridays for Future” movement, Joe Seagram was in a meeting with other school administrators from the Halifax area. When the discussion turned to Swedish teen Greta Thunberg, who began the climate action protests, it became clear that he was the odd one out in the group – his colleagues did not share his enthusiasm about the movement.

“They were so against it,” says Seagram, headmaster of King’s-Edgehill School in Windsor, N.S., about 45 minutes north of Halifax. “I was hearing a principal say, ‘I am trying to run a school here, these kids have classes to go to.’ One principal actually threatened to suspend students for even advertising the day, let alone missing a day of classes to go [protest] on behalf of Mother Nature.”

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Unlike his peers, Seagram was “all behind it,” he says, so the private International Baccalaureate school provided a bus for interested students to attend the May 27 march in nearby Wolfville.

“Greta, she’s my hero ... And I am hoping that her voice really is heard,” says Seagram, who has been headmaster since 2008. “This older generation, we have a lot to answer for, and our kids are just starting to figure it out.”

Despite little mention of climate change in the provincially-mandated curriculum, Seagram believes cultivating a deep understanding of the issue is the best way to prepare students for an uncertain future. In addition to incorporating climate-change education into numerous courses, the school has invested in improving its waste diversion strategy, eliminating paper, sourcing local food for the dining hall and significantly reducing food waste – becoming a certified Nova Scotia “Green School” in the process.

If Seagram had his way, he would eliminate the use of fossil fuels at the school entirely, instead sourcing power from geothermal, wind and solar energy production.

“The onus is on us to teach and to model behaviour,” he says. “As schools, you can’t teach geography, history and math without seeing the bigger picture ... What we really need is kids who can take that information and think critically.”

In his Grade 12 law class, King’s-Edgehill teacher Derek Bouwman uses a legal lens to teach students about the causes of global warming and the hydrofluorocarbons used in refrigeration, leading discussion around the ways environmental legislation can be used to make positive change.

Taking a hands-on approach to these lessons, he recently ran a case study in which students were divided into stakeholder groups and told to create legislation governing the use of seeds from a fictional company mimicking Monsanto.

He believes the students have a general interest in environmental issues but sees his role as helping fill gaps in their understanding, so they can discuss climate change with confidence.

"It requires research and analysis to get to a fluency," he said, noting that he supports the climate strike movement but feels protesting is just one step toward being engaged. "I want to help the kids make sure they're educated and thoughtful in what they do."

Ryan Alguire, a former history and social-studies teacher at King's-Edgehill, added significant environmental content to his courses, and says he's disappointed to see how little the issue appears in Nova Scotia's core curriculum, which mandates learning outcomes for all students in the province. "Despite knowing it's an issue for 35 years, it hasn't made it into the curriculum."

Alguire, who moved to British Columbia at the end of the 2018-2019 school year, says that while the Grade 8 social-studies textbook mentions the impact humans have on the environment, it doesn't use the term "climate change."

Until his departure, Alguire led the school's Green Team, the student-led environmental club that took charge of developing a recycling program and planting a vegetable garden to grow food for the dining room. He joined the students at the Fridays for Future rally in May and says he sees significant educational value in encouraging them to participate in the discussion.

"Most people at the forefront of curriculum would say problem-based learning, experiential learning, is the way humans work best. I can't think of a better problem-based learning environment than global climate change," Alguire says. "I can't think of any time in human history where a problem of this size and magnitude has faced the human race, and we have to collaboratively work on it."

King's-Edgehill Grade 12 student Katie Goddard, whose mother is an environmental lawyer, is an active member of the Green Team and participated in the May climate strike. She says Fridays for Future has helped bring the issue of climate change to the forefront for many young people who weren't thinking about it much before.

"Everyone is talking about the strikes," says Goddard, whose French class did a unit on climate change and biodiversity last year. She believes the protests are a valuable use of learning time because of they raise awareness about global warming – an important step in convincing people to change their behaviour.

"I think that every bit of action taken against the climate crisis is relevant. Although posting about it on your Instagram feed doesn't make a difference, you're educating other people on the topic. It goes the same way for the protests," Goddard says.

"Me and my mom always talk about how you can only do as much as you can do. If there's an opportunity for you to take action and make change, you should do it."

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